

XXIII

a dead spot of light...

Introduction

There it is ... number 23. In the past months I have had no real motivation to write on music and considering the inability of bands to even hand in answers to interview questions made me put all on a low flame. What I had worked in constantly somehow had been the one long review that is part of this magazine. Sabazius' "The Descent of Man" is certainly unique in the broader context and conception in the metal scene. It is hard to find something of equal proportions and this makes it interesting as well as a challenge. As there is an additional introduction for this review, no further words are wasted on this subject.

Two additional interviews have found their way into this comparably small edition.

Where to go from here?

Well ... I am about to start something that had been subject of a discussion in the Metal Archives forum, but I had not been able to present my idea on this subject so far. This will change in the near future ...hopefully and maybe even with the next edition of this magazine.

Questions, comments, hate mail and whatnot shall be directed at:

oneyoudontknow at yahoo dot de

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Interviews

Calico Jack

Why don't you start off by introducing the band a bit? When and by whom had it been started? Who would conduct this interview?

Yo Ho Ahoy, Landlubbers!

Calico Jack started around December 2011, when brothers Toto(rhythm guitar) and Caps(drums) met with Dave the fiddler in some Irish pub here in Milan, Italy.

Then in no time, the other three mates joined the crew: Ricky Riva(bass), Melo(lead guitar) and Giò(vocals).

Since the day of the first drink, the band has aimed to become the greatest pirate metal act in the world: this may sound a bit arrogant, but if you mind that world's well-known pirate metal bands are not more than a dozen, such a goal becomes more humble and feasible. Oh, and when we say 'greatest pirate metal band' what we mean is 'greatest pirate metal band, after Running Wild'. No pirate metal band will ever overcome Running Wild.

This interview will be conducted by our dead mascot: Cpt. Rackham, a seaweed-covered living corpse that will sum up the thought of all the crew.

So, who would be your favourite pirate?

Of course everyone in the band, as everyone in life, got his favourite pirate. Here they are:

Toto: I'm the creator of the band concept, so....Calico Jack(you don't say!)

Caps: Rock Braziliano

Giò: Guybrush Threepwood (Monkey Island)

Dave: LeChuck (Monkey Island)

Melo: Mr. Smee (Peter Pan)

Ricky Riva: Bah, I think this question is bullshit.

Why did you pick the name of an English pirate after all and what makes "Calico Jack" so special? Can you write about your "local heroes"?

Here in Italy we say: 'Italy is a country of saints, poets and navigators'. Yes, there were many navigators in Italy, but no pyrates. In fact there were some, but very few, and they were not cool at all. Instead, British and Irish pyrates were really cool. I mean, you imagine a pyrate yelling 'Mamma mia!' instead of 'Avast! Shiver me timbers!', or maybe drinkin' limoncello in place of rum: Italy just don't fit for pyrates. But now we're there, and we hope to change that soon!

About Calico Jack, how shall we put it: he was a scourge of the Caribbeans, he was free, he lived and traveled in amazing tropical island, he designed the amazing Jolly Roger, he had in his crew two amazing and beautiful pyrate women, and finally he was hanged in Port Royal, with his body put on display at the entrance of the town. Everything of this guy was amazing.

How does the folk metal come into play? Why not something with a bit more punch? Death metal maybe ... piracy is a rather gruesome business.

Folk metal is by far the most suitable genre to singing of corsairs and galleons. If you play death metal you have to stick to death metal issues: you must speak of disembowelments, defecations and every kind of mass slaughter. Of course, pyrates did these things too, but there was more in their world: indeed, they spent all their time drinking, singing, sailing and banging wenches.

Anyway, music and chants have always been part of the world of navigation; there are sailing-related songs from all over the world, in every historical period, and chants were a way to relieve the fatigue of working on board. In particular, pyrates were obviously more cheerful and reveller of most of the regular sailors, and musicians were always present in a reputable crew of sea prowlers.

Therefore, with our music, we want to get closer to the atmospheres and melodies heard by real sea wolves, at the time of their businesses: that's why we chose folk metal, with its compelling rhythms and its rhymes fascinating.

In your biography you write about influences from the 80s heavy metal and Scandinavian folk that are a source of inspiration for your music. Can you write about these and your reasons for preferring them over other ones?

We talked about influence from generic 80s metal but, to be honest, what we really meant was influence from Running Wild. Besides being a band of fundamental importance, considered one of the fathers and founders of the heavy metal sound, Running Wild music got all was needed to play excellent pirate metal. Right from their first album there were folk influences in the songs, as well as cheerful and evocative melodies mixed with rough riffs. Not to mention the variety of rhythmic and the wonderful atmosphere that makes you feel on board a galleon. Even today, in my opinion, no one has managed to bring that atmosphere in the world of metal. Calico Jack are trying and will always try to pay homage to legendary Running Wild.

In addition, of course, we are inspired to immortal bands like Judas Priest and Iron Maiden and the inimitable feeling of the NWOBHM era. Despite being out of fashion, we decided to keep the standard E-tuning on the guitars, paying homage to that period.

Influences from modern folk metal bands are somewhat obvious: although bands like Finntroll and Moonsorrow speak of trolls, Vikings and Druids, when you listen to them, you can easily daydream about sailors and boardings. Just replace in the lyrics: 'hammer' with 'cutlass', 'Valhalla' with 'Port Royal' and 'drinking mead' with 'drinking Barbados rum'. Let's try!

How would you describe your music? What references to other bands exist?

Well, our music has two main goals: wildly entertaining people with alcoholic broadsides like 'Sharkbite Johnny'(our demo's opening track) so we make a large use of humppa-like rhythms; and immersing audience in the seamen atmospheres(we're working more on this for the next songs). Also we intend to include in our music influences from the Caribbean, Afro-American and tribal music(you can see that in 'Caraibica' from the demo), for it fits well with the setting(so we also look at bands like Angra and Puya), as well as, of course, rhythms and dances from Celtic and Anglosaxon world.

Will there a chance to hear more than just a violin on a future recording? An accordion would be an ample choice as well.

We have thought about recruiting an accordionist(accordion is the ultimate pyrate instrument, of course), and even a keyboard/synth player to make the songs the most epic and majestic. However, at least for now, we decided to have a more compact line-up, and to make it sound rough and direct, as much as possible. So we have only added the violin to the classic 5-pieces heavy metal line-up, trying in this way to differentiate ourselves from the average folk metal band, that is often overflowing with musicians and instruments of all kinds.

Moreover, in many of the stages where we played there would be no place for an accordionist, sometimes there was not even room for the six of us and we had to place the violinist offstage! So at the moment we are 'so few', even for a matter of space.

You have one release out so far. Tell us a bit more about it. How long did it take you to get it done, how have the responses been etc.?

The total time it took to realize "Scum of the Seas", our first demo, was about a month. It is completely realized by Calico Jack and a few of our friends, who have helped us for free.

All those who have worked on this CD were at their first recording experience, and you can hear that in the raw mixing and recordings. However, this makes the disk more 'True Norwegian'.

On the other hand, the reactions from famous Italian webzines have been better than we expected, and they encouraged us to continue on our route. Now we're armed and dangerous, ready to do better, much better!

The title is rather curious: "Scum of the Seas". How is it supposed to be understood in the context of your music?

'Scum of the seas' is one of the many ways pyrates were called, obviously it was intended in a derogatory manner.

At the time of Golden Age of Piracy, in fact they were despised, ridiculed and demonized in every way, especially by monarchies and institutions, as in reality they were free men, who lived above the rules, breaking balls to society, especially to the empires trading companies. In particular, the proliferation of pyrates in that period was due to the miserable conditions in which 'regular' ships treated the sailors, often recruiting them on board against their will, and often dooming them to certain death, due to fatigue, hunger or diseases. Pyrates were sailors who simply took advantage of an opportunity to break free from a life of suffering, they formed communities and lived without constraints, yearning success and wealth. They were not the demons they are depicted, and many of them did not kill anyone unless they were forced.

They lived in defiance of the institutions, and this is what we like most of them. They were treated like annoying 'scum' by society; if the established order despises you, somehow it must mean you're going in the right direction.

How do you deal with the live performance? Do you dress up properly? What is it that someone can expect from a live concert of Calico Jack.

It is not easy to manage a pirate band, there's always someone who asks: Where is the parrot? And the eye patches? And the cannon balls? And the peg legs? At that point you say, "No, man, we will not amputate none of our limbs for the sake of the show! Go and ask to do this to some goregrind band!"

At the moment we can not even afford the costumes (unfortunately in real life we're not pyrates, so we're not swimming in gold), but, as soon as possible, we will think about proper stage scenography and clothes.

After all, one of the characteristics of our music is the inclusion of the viewer in the pirate setting, so the visual component will become essential.

When we will take care of the clothes, though, we will do so with the utmost seriousness and accuracy, and it should not seem like we came out from Disneyland's Pirates of the Caribbean Restaurant.

Anyway, at the moment, here I am: Cpt. Rackham, a drunk undead who wanders on stage during the concerts. This should be enough for now!

Now I will conclude with a few words politically correct: however, the important thing is the music, the important thing is what you are, not what you look like or what you're wearing, blah-blah-blah and so on...

Do you have some forthcoming releases? What are the plans for the future?

Aye, our second demo will be released this summer, and we're ready to reveal title & tracklist, in worldwide exclusive just for A Dead Spot of Light! The title is 'Panic in the Harbour', it will feature 4 brand new songs, with more distinguished sounds and influences than the first work.

And now let's go with the clichés that one must say when publishing a new album: It will be faster, more powerful, more brutal, it's absolutely the best demo we've ever done, This is really what we are!

TITLE: Panic in the Harbour

TRACKLIST:

01 Where Hath th Rum Gone

02 House of Jewelry

03 Grog Jolly Grog

04 Deadly Day in Bounty Bay

In case someone is interested in your music, how and where can this person buy your stuff?

You can listen & download the mp3 version of everything we published, on our website.

For the physical copy you can contact us to 'calicojacktheband@gmail.com', please email us your address and we'll send you the CD for free. Support Piracy in music!

How can people get in touch with you? What Internet sites do you use?

For any questions or information contact us at 'calicojacktheband@gmail.com'.

OFFICAL SITE: <http://calicojacktheband.altervista.org/>

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Calico-Jack/269653663086210>

SOUNDCLOUD: <https://soundcloud.com/calico-jack-folk-metal/sets/calico-jack-scum-of-the-seas>

Some closing comments if you like

We bid farewell (with our firing cannons) to all the readers and to A Dead Spot of Light, which spread the Word of Metal across the seven seas.

Three hurray for all of ye! Yohoho, and a bottle of rum, of course....

Abandoned Dreams

Why don't you start off by introducing the band a bit? When and by whom had it been started? Who would conduct this interview?

The Band was formed in 2009 by Raphael/Me (Vox/Guitars), Michael (Drums) and Liesa (Bass). After writing the first songs and a lot of changing within the LineUp we met Niklas (Guitars) in April 2011 at our show . Since that time we played lots of gigs, recorded and released our Demo-EP „Ember and Frost“ (Oct. 2011), went to Norway writing new Songs and now we are in the middle of creating the new Full-Length Album called „Isolation and Solitude“, which will be recorded during the next weeks and will be released this fall.

We're proud of having shared stages with Bands like Negura Bunget, Waldgeflüster and the mighty Agalloch and looking forward to more great shows with great bands.

What had been your reasons for picking your band name?

Our Bassist Liesa came up with „Abandoned Dreams“ in the beginning of the Band when looking for a Name that stands for that dark and melancholic atmosphere our music's all about.

What are abandoned dreams? Have these simply been put aside, laid to rest or simply forgotten? Why is it even necessary to revisit them?

For me there is no deeper meaning in the name „Abandoned Dreams“.

It fits and describes what our music is about. A darkened and melancholic way of life and seeing the beauty not every one sees...

How would you describe the music that you are playing? Can you name some influences in this respect?

I think the music we play comes from our point of view seeing the world and everything around us. It's about creating a melancholic and deep atmosphere in which we loose ourselves and express that kind of feelings which are hard to express without music.

It's deep, heavy, slow and kept simple,... no bombast, no overproduced stuff.

This is about atmospheric and emotional music....

There are two ways you can get influenced as a musician:

On the one side you are influenced by everything around you,...where you live, nature in general, your whole situation of life.

The other side of course is the music you listen to everyday... To name some Bands we like listen to:

Woods of Ypres, Katatonia, Darkthrone, Enslaved, Lifelover, My Dying Bride... a lot of Black and Doom/Dark Metal Bands

You use the description “blackened doom” on your homepage. Can you elaborate your interpretation of this expression? It seems like the black outweighs the doom on your first ep.

Yeah, there you might be right. The reason for that is in the lineup changings and in not really knowing which way to go...

It's hard to stay alive playing doom metal, and by doom metal i mean playing slow and heavy music, not that kind of crap some call doom which is just modern melodic death metal with lyrics about suicide and some melancholic hooklines...

On the new Album will be more doom,... slow down-tempo Riffs, more melancholy, more atmosphere, less black metal, but it will still be an influence and you will hear, where our roots are...

A lot of bands – yes, a generalization – use a rather distinct as well as annoying way of screaming in their mixture of doom and black metal. Why do you prefer growling; something that adds some amount of heaviness to it all?

Annoying is a good word to describe the way a lot of singers act...

Of course in the Back Metal genre especially in the scandinavian old school Black Metal Scene more screaming is used,... it is that way of music and it fits perfect, maybe not very healthy but it fits.

For Abandoned Dreams I use most times low and deep growls adding to the Guitars and Drums. So the Sound becomes complete and like one being. Keeping the whole sound very deep and heavy.

To bring out some special points I also use screams, but instead of highpitched shouts i use more my normal voice,... getting the despair into the music.

When it comes to the actual song-writing, then how does the band deal with this aspect? Is it a community effort or does the band have a leader so to speak? Would the same be true in terms of the musical direction/evolution

The lyrics are completely written by myself, cause it's my way to express emotions and deal with things I normally don't talk about.

The musical-songwriting is most done by me and Nik,... we come up with the riffs and songstructures, then added the drumbeats by Mike and completed in the Bandroom by all members...

Most times everyone brings ideas and changes into the songs, so the main construct is by one member and the others do the final arrangements.

I think it's important to keep this simple, cause too many songwriters will bring to many influences in the songs and they could sound too different.

If someone does not like one idea or riff it will be changed or deleted. The main point in doing music should be the fact that you like what you do!!

According to your homepage you worked on your debut album in a hut in Norway for two weeks. Admit it, you simply want to have some of the Norwegian spirit injected in your music. The question is, did you succeed in your attempt?

Well, of course the two songs we wrote there do not sound like some norwegian Black Metal or something like that, but there is a deep inspiring spirit in norway. Its landscapes in special are very inspiring... and for me, it was a great trip, a fantastic chance to learn something new and get some northern spirit in our music.

How do you feel about the Norwegian metal scene anyway? A lot has changed over the years, or? Also the German one has seen a considerable shift. Are you still able to enjoy what is being thrown on the market?

Difficult Question...:

Many things have changed within two decades of norwegian / Scandinavian Black Metal...

I think the last existing real black metal band is DARKTHRONE, cause they still do what they want, no matter of commercialism or genre. (That is the real spirit of black metal)

They started with raw black metal and changed through death metal, punk to 80's thrash n heavy metal.

Generally the norwegian scene is more open for influences by other genres and musical styles.

So Enslaved get their own way to combine early 70's Prog-Rock (Rush/Yes/Genesis) and their own roots in black metal.

Or other bands like Dimmu Borgir, Ulver,....

...

Sometimes it is difficult to get along with new releases... The sound of most productions is too clean and tight, every groove is eliminated by drums being triggered and edited as shit.

But yes, there are a lot of good new outputs by new or younger bands and of course by well known artists and bands aswell.

Why do you use the English and not the German tongue? Are you able to express yourself on such a level that the gap between these two languages is pretty much non-existent? Can the texts be found in the booklet?

Oh pretty easy:

I use english as language for being understood by more people than only german.

It is all about spreading the message all over the planet and it is more usefull choosing a language most people understand.

Due to financial reasons there were no lyrics or booklet with the EP „Ember And Frost“.

The new album will include a 8 pages booklet with parts of the lyrics and a lot of expressing artwork.

Can you elaborate on the conceptual background of your music: loneliness, depression and departures into the unknown. Why do these three aspects have a fascination for you?

The music of Abandoned Dreams is a very important way of expressing myself and my emotions.

In the lyrics I deal with my personal life, my feelings, fears and thoughts.

So the lyrics are in some parts very intimate but always metaphorical !!

I want the listeners to get their own way into the music and the lyrics are just my point of view.

You have also hit the stage already, right? Can you share some experiences?

We are playing live since the very beginning.

It is not always easy 'cause of our very special genre of music to play live with other bands.

But we are honored having shared the stage with Bands like Agalloch, Negura Bunget and Fen.

These were fantastic shows and there was a great spirit in the audience too.

Do you have some forthcoming releases? What are the plans for the future? How will the music differ or change?

We are right now recording our first FULL-LENGTH Album which will be released in the end of 2013.

It will be the same guiding line: Solitude, isolation and depression.

The music will be more DOOM oriented but of course there will be still moments of raw and hatefull black metal.

In case someone is interested in your music, how and where can this person buy your stuff?

Not believing in some commercial label distribution we sell our whole merchandise in our own online-shop.

<http://www.abandoned-dreams.com>

There you can get the last few copies of our EP, T-Shirts (All sizes and girlies) and all other stuff we got on stock.

For people who only want to download our music:

www.abandoneddreams.bandcamp.com

The EP is for free downloadable and the upcoming Album will be there for a few bucks, too.

How can people get in touch with you? What Internet sites do you use?

The most easy way to contact us is to send us some message in facebook. (The FB-Page is hosted by our drummer Mike)

For information on booking, online-shop or general contact please use:

info@abandoned-dreams.com

booking@abandoned-dreams.com

shop@abandoned-dreams.com

Homepages and Social-Media:

www.abandoned-dreams.com

www.facebook.com/abandoneddreamsmetal

www.youtube.com/abandoneddreamsmetal

www.abandoneddreams.bandcamp.com

Closing:

Thank you for the opportunity to introduce Abandoned Dreams and our music.

If you want to get in contact with us for any reason, feel free to write messages and e-mails.

All supporters are very welcome and all money for buying in our shop goes directly to the Band.

Keep handmade music alive and support your local scene!!

Thanks and Cheers to all readers, listeners and fans

Special thanks to the oneyoudontknow!!!

HornsUp

Raphael and Abandoned Dreams

Sabazius - The Descent of Man

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An introduction

Not many will be familiar with this band or rather not many might have known about them, but this could have changed since. With their latest output “The Descent of Man” Sabazius have definitely been able to gather some attention. This has not only to do with the rather uncommon design of this release, but also with the daring type of music that comes with it. Originally a two-man project they aligned with George Leaver (Death Cabaret, Funeral Hag, Pagan Terrorism Tactics, Sea Bastard) in order to be able to rely on someone who would take care of the drums for this extensive live recording. Yes indeed, this composition of eleven hours, eleven minutes and fifty-four seconds had been recorded in one single session as well as live in a studio. As if the band's general approach would not be unconventional enough, with this latest output they have also set the bar to levels which seem impossible to penetrate again.

The following pages present an attempt of a dive into this incomprehensibility, this monstrosity, this nearly half-a-day consumer and dare to contain a discussion on its facets in a comparably broad as well as an extensive kind of way. Of course, due to the sheer complexity and the limitations of expressing through language the distinct facets of music or art in general, only a vague snapshot can be exhibited. Hence, the reader should feel encouraged to give “The Descent of Man” a try as well and come to his or her own conclusions on how to place it all into the broader context of the arts and the metal genre in particular.

Questions, comments, hate mail and whatnot shall be directed at:

oneyoudontknow at yahoo dot de

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Some initial thoughts on the topic

Once you try to grasp the complexity of these four words – The Descent of Man –, you take a dive into a world of linguistic paradoxes. By ignoring the first and immediate impression, this short phrase that has found its way into the title of this live album, reveals more complex and bewildering once it is analysed and put into perspective. Yet it presents itself in a concrete and definite kind of way; “the”. Through this it indicates an overall lack of alternative, the so-called “TINA”-principle. The word “the” has a crippling effect, the word “descent” has a direction and “man” emphasises the entire phrase somehow. From the past, from a place of time immemorial, a vague history is still holding us down, is still reminding us on our biological place in this world and is leaving some of us in self-denial. Another more recent interpretation comes with a rather socio-economic connotation. With the on-going neo-liberal hysteria, especially in Europe, aspects of modern civilization vanish in front of our eyes and the battles and sacrifices of our ancestors seem to have been in vain. The irony that surrounds the deaths of Thatcher and Reagan would be comical, would their legacy have faded out of the minds as well as the poisonous concoctions that they had spread. Yet these persist. As if we were dying of thirst, we continue to long for the cup of hemlock, swallowing its content without any consideration for the ill effects. Along this comes a strange kind of pornography¹, a graphically as well as visually enthralling longing for an utopian future, in which Man is (finally) absent; the world saved from this supposed monstrosity. A so-called harmony is re-established.

“In antiquity, life was nothing but silence.”²

Following the line of reason from the preceding paragraph, this sentence by Luigi Russolo³ receives a strange and disturbing connotation. It becomes a future prospect that parts of society seem to long for and hope to arrive

¹See the comments of Slavoj Žižek on this topic for instance.

²Russolo, Luigi; page 4

³In order to get some insights into his person the material uploaded at Ubu are of great help:

- <http://www.ubu.com/historical/russolo/index.html>

at again. With it the pagan idea of renewal through destruction, the cyclical idea of progression, receives a facet with a disturbing subliminal current of hatred towards all kinds of culture and civilization⁴. Without guarantee for reaching another societal level comparable to ours again, their dogmatic longing for a past that has never been, is in effect a death warrant for everything and all⁵. Linguistics are tricky in this regard, because they like to give the listener and reader the impression that with the descent a new low has actually been reached, while the original status appears to have been much more gloomy, harmonious and spiritually rewarding. It is a hubris that falls short of any deeper insights into the broader workings of nature, society and culture as a whole. These aspects of the descent of man, more can be brought up but none shine too promising, set a precedent, whose implications may still – and despite all fading memories of the Enlightenment – take the world by storm. There is no guarantee that the bulwarks out of the memories and victories of the past will save man from the blind follies of the masses.⁶ There is again a chance that silence may drown us all.

It would be nice to continue on this path and dissect the performance of the British band in regard to society and culture of today. Yet a review on this release would have been incomplete without some kind of rambling on the misunderstandings of these four words; at least from today's perspective and with the on-going crisis in the ecosphere. Man likes to jump at the first conclusion that a certain term or phrase might give to this person, while the broader and maybe even hidden issue remains untouched. Somehow these two paragraphs are nevertheless of some importance, because they help to shed light on something the two musicians behind Sabazius tend to deal with on a continuous basis. Already with their eponymous debut album religion as well as mythology received some attention and were presented in such a way as to leave the listener in a state of confusion and enlightenment. Through well placed contrasts the message of each of the samples – see the track Occult – appears deconstructed⁷ from its original work⁸.

“The Descent of Man” is also a reference to a book of Charles Darwin of course. The Brits have removed parts of the title for this release though: The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex⁹. Yet it would have taken away some the fascination as well as indicating a rather obvious allusion to or rather idea of what the band might not have had in mind. Due to the lack of concreteness and by distorting the reference Sabazius enables the listener to interpret the title in a much broader way; insight into the matter is reached as a result of the search. When it comes to put things into a proper perspective, then also the discography of the band should be taken into consideration and this needs some discussion.

As has been outlined above, one way of interpreting the term “descent” is to place it into the context of evolution theory. Even though this idea is well established in the sciences, there is an on-going attempt to attack and ridicule it by the religious community; especially by radical Christian sects and others. Noteworthy in this regard is how on numerous releases of Sabazius it is the aspect of religion that tends to pop up again and again. On the debut album a juxtaposition between Christianity and various types of mysticism exposes some of the underlying currents and ideas, even though their confusing way of appearance – rather due to the way how the fragments have been merged together than the sole content of each part alone – might have the ability to take the listener on “a trip” than enlightening this person in one way or another. The music does its part to emphasize

• http://www.ubu.com/sound/russolo_1.html

Wikipedia merely scratches on the surface and does merely contain some basic information, while important ones are neglected or shoved into the link section.

⁴It is what Ulrich Horstmann discusses quite extensively in his book “Das Untier”.

⁵It seems rather pointless to refer to Noam Chomsky in this regard, but he brought this issue up in numerous talks. Also his thoughts on Green Anarchy are noteworthy and worth considering.

⁶Read Gustave Le Bon's “The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind” and also the comments of Freud on this topic. It is the aspect of crowd psychology that should not be underestimated and the recent tendencies in the Middle East and how they play out give a vague indication on how uncertain democracy and its short-term effects can be. To put it rather mildly and without taking a dive into the complexity of this issue.

⁷Whether it is possible to retain all of the original meanings is a difficult thing to say for someone like me from outside the spectrum of the cultural sciences, but at least something like that can be expected.

⁸It seems necessary to emphasize that the debut album is not in a way representative for the overall style of the band. Some facets are allowed to make a re-appearance in one way or another on other outputs, but the general idea of combining samples with a rather slow and minimalist merging of doom and drone metal is not what the band attempted to head for on a continuous basis. Furthermore, as the band rarely prints their lyrics – not that they would generally have many to begin with – it is difficult to deal with this aspect accordingly. One has to listen to the music, attempt to do a transcript and perform a research later on. What initially may be suspected to be of an instrumental kind can later appear to be loaded with samples of various types.

⁹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Descent_of_Man,_and_Selection_in_Relation_to_Sex

and intensify certain passages, phrases and moods. What makes the debut particularly interesting is the focal point with which the samples show up, how they have been placed into the concept and transport the messages. It is somehow ironic how certain Christian dealings are exposed by nothing more than bringing them into the light of day; the persons are judged by their actual expressions or interpretations of the mysticism and not by some abstract and inexplicable construct of ideas that has been laid down by someone at some point in history. Thenceforth it continues with various references to the occult, to mysticism, to religion and whatnot.¹⁰

A first dive into the music

How does “The Descent of Man” fit into this? Well, a piece of more than eleven hours in length cannot possibly be measured by any ordinary or conventional standard. The same is true of another and equally absurd composition: Napalm Death’s “You Suffer”¹¹. Maybe the former can be interpreted as a caricature of the latter one; even though this might have never played a role in the first place. The former extends to over eleven hours – presumably the longest live recording as well as the longest composition/album in the metal genre –, while the latter would be the shortest recognized composition ever, with a bit more than a second in total. In each case the listener feels slightly mocked, laughed at. Both pieces are somewhat incomprehensible, fall out of the everyday spectrum of time and also on how culture values the art of music. Leaving this immediate aspect aside, the way these songs had been crafted wakes memories on the conception that the Futurists had in mind. Music has become noise, has broken with the omnipresent silence, but avoids harmonious elements and tendencies.

“Noise¹² was really not born before the 19th century, with the advent of machinery. Today noise reigns supreme over human sensibility.”¹³

Even though this statement holds a lot of truth in it, the way noise affects life and culture has changed over the years. The industrial workplace – especially those in the Western/Northern hemisphere – has become less noisy for instance, while man surrounds himself with increasingly diverse sounds of various types. Björk’s compositions and the videos in “Dancer in the Dark” feel like a relic of a time gone by. The tide has shifted and it is the robots that have taken over the lead and replaced the chaotic disharmonies with a continuous and well planned performance. It is not much of a surprise to see a robot band play some Motörhead songs these days¹⁴. In the broader course of the music, an evolution towards more extreme types of expression has not penetrated much of the mainstream¹⁵. When it comes to the underground though, a lively scene can be discovered as well as experienced. Sabazius fall into this category as well¹⁶. Despite a certain focus on the doom metal genre, elements from drone, noise and ambient have its place in various compositions to some extent. Also this latest attempt of the British band is no exception in this regard and the musicians leave no doubt that from the very first minute.

¹⁰To deal with each release in depth in this review would be misleading and go beyond the original scope of this text.

Nevertheless, the writer of these lines would like to encourage everyone, who happen to have an interest in this band and their music, to take a close look at their way of approaching music and arrangements.

¹¹The issue surrounding this rather absurdly short composition can be examined in the documentary Napalm Death - The Scum Story.

¹²The sentence is somewhat preposterous and even more so because it comes from an Italian. Already the Roman commanders knew of the power of noise and how it can be brought to proper use. A number of legions parading through a newly conquered territory did not only impress through the sheer number of people and equipment, but also due to the sound that they created. Ottorino Respighi’s “Pini di Roma (Pines of Rome)” or to be more precise the fourth movement “I pini della Via Appia: Tempo di marcia (Pines of the Appian Way)” give an impression on how such a scene could have sounded like. What has changed though is the permanency in which sound and noise affect the society especially since the days of the industrialization.

¹³Russolo, Luigi; page 4

¹⁴Compressorhead – Ace of Spades (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RBSKq-St8>)

¹⁵See this article for some insights into the matter: <http://www.ubu.com/papers/noise.html>

¹⁶Most of the band’s releases are available for download, while physical outputs are actually a rare exception. This band does not always follow in line with the current tendency to spread obscure music on outdated formats/designs with ridiculous limitations in terms of the copies.

A dive into a deep ocean

It all opens in a rather stylistically free and noisy kind of way. A distorted guitar plays some chords, which are allowed to linger on for a while. Coherence in the sense of a melody is basically missing, because the riffs appear stretched to such lengths that to grasp them proves to be rather difficult. Therefore, it is rather the atmosphere and how it is unfolding that is of some importance. Interestingly the drums – takes some dozens of minutes for them to join in – add nuances of dynamics, while the riffs tend to be in a certain amount of flow. Funny how their sound swings to and fro, but is unable to break out of the permanency of an underlying current of noise. Vague escapes are allowed ... but nothing more.

A first eruption can be found at roughly one hour and twenty-nine minutes – writing these words feels strange and bewildering – but all breaks down again and fades off into the noisy reverb of the guitar, which is then allowed to persist. Nearly two minutes later the same happens again... and again... and again. Over time the music becomes more concrete though and vague rhythmic facets begin to unravel. Once the mark of one hour and thirty-seven minutes has been reached, the dim burst of an unintelligible voice can be recognized. Yet it has no impact on the direction and progression of the music. All moves continuously on in the same steady way like it did before ...

Sometime later a slight reinvention of the music can be discovered and melodies unravel themselves. A steady pace, a minimalist melody and in a style that follows a basic idea of this band on their numerous previous releases. A unity is formed once 2:40:00 has been passed. What follow though is another break down and then a bass-driven evolution of a melody. After a while the strings vanish though and the cold patterns of the percussion instrument set a pace no one dares to follow. It is of no surprise to experience the short reappearance of the strings only in an incomprehensible kind of noise and not with recognizable chords or riffs.

Around 3:30:00 the bass is back with a vengeance and extremely powerful “earthen” chords add a nuance to the sound that the track has lacked so far. It feels thicker, has a touch of nastiness to it and has a strange kind of concreteness through the impact of the riffs. Roughly ten minutes later a shift takes place that is quite extreme. The drums vanish all of a sudden, while a dense guitar layer in the background gives the impression of a mockery of everything that has taken place the last hour or so. The increase in complexity, the build-up of ideas and the general progression into the realm of ordinary music seem to have gone for a moment. It differs from all earlier facets through a general lack of disturbing effects as well as vague rhythms; all one can hear is a distant throbbing-like sound. This evolves into an oscillating texture and then into a structure with musical seeds, which are never allowed to unfold their potential and beauty. On and on it goes, while little variation is allowed to leave its mark.

... and once 4:10:00 has been reached, the noise and the powerful guitars are back. It is a definite break or rather it is another definite break.

A characteristic of this long track is the rather successive nature of the arrangements and the reluctance of the band to let things unfold in a somewhat predictable manner. One part leads over to another, but the reasons why this happens, the reasons why the elements appear in their particular way remain hidden and inexplicable. Even though only four hours of this eleven hour monster have passed at this point, this aspect can already be identified. “The Descent of Man” is rather a kind of jamming, an evolution by chance than something that gives the idea of a superior being, whose actions have a distinct influence on it all. And this brings it back into the realm of Sabazius and throws in Darwin.

... a bit later it all takes a turn in a direction no one will certainly have expected. Chords appear in such a way as to give the impression of the sound of a bell; ding dang dong. Played with some sense of variation of course, but the general direction remains the same and it can be identified readily.

Not only in terms of the overall sound and concept this part is of some significance, it is the variation of the riff, the way the band makes it somehow disappear is what makes it fascinating and stand out. In the past Sabazius rather stuck to a certain idea and repeated it over time, while additional elements helped to divert from monotony and plainness. Here rather the contrary is the case. Through this play with the riff the atmosphere moves out of the realm of stagnation and occasional boosts into other spheres towards something more concrete and

palpable. The listener is able to follow the band on their adventure once such small isles unfold themselves out of some incomprehensible mist. The tiny specks mark a vague counterpoint to the nebulous realm that dominates most of the composition.

... half an hour later the noise is back again and an idea from the beginning of the track is allowed to have a second appearance; a comparison reveals this readily. The same would be true for the succeeding guitar part, even though the powerful bass in the background is new to the game.

A shorter version would have been possible without much effort or doubt and all the “pointless” repetitions, this endless meandering or dancing around a subject could have been dealt with in much simpler kind of way. It can be asked whether something good would have come out of it. What is it that could have been added through another hour, another day ... or maybe even a whole week? In some respect it comes over as an attempt to push it too hard and as a call for some attention. Certainly, minimalism can have its own fascination, but once it is pressed over excess it loses its fascination. Here the minimalism is not minimal, but rather comes over as an attempt to suffocate or drown.

Guitar reverb, interrupted by a burst of the guitars and around 5:12:00 we have vocals. Yes, the band wants to talk to the fans. These might have some difficulties in actually understanding them, but it is a welcome if rare counterpoint to the noise.

Even though the vocals are actually something quite natural, their appearance at this very moment in the composition raises some eye-brows. With an intensity that reminds the listener on the core facets of the band, the atmosphere is as such as if it could burst open and unleash an immense amount of energy.

On and on it goes. Burst after burst occurs, broken into pieces by the still penetrative guitar reverb. The middle part of this track contains these somewhat odd juxtapositions. On and on this repetition goes, while 5:40:00 indicates another shift into a different direction. Variations of the motive make an appearance, but these elbow out the vocals and create even more space for the noise texture. 5:53:00 sets a new pace and introduces riff-oriented structures again. Here the music becomes more complex, shows more facets, resembles more conventional music and structures so to speak. Doom, yes ordinary doom metal is destined to show its face. Similar to the other segments of this track, also this one is allowed to have a considerable piece of the cake and some small scale variations. After a short interlude of noisy elements, around 6:18:00 another doom metal melody is let loose and presents to the listener a distinct kind of melody which comes with the usual kind of repetition and variation. Thereafter an interesting shift in the concept is allowed to appear and unfold itself. What initially comes over as a segment that is constantly interrupted by the guitars, progresses into some kind of noisy jamming, which leaves nothing but confusion, while with each second it leads the listener one step closer to some drone/noise pattern.

6:51:00 marks an abrupt change in direction, due to a sudden drop to silence. What follows reminds on Earth (“HEX; or Printing in the Infernal Method” for instance), with the reverb, the desolation that is expressed through the minimalism, the vagueness in the dynamics, all this is nothing but another stark contrast to what had been presented before. The noise vanishes and a disturbing emptiness fills the gap and even though distorted metal guitars break this monotony at times. Soon after the noise returns though, yet only for a short period of time, because the throbbing bass – accompanied by the drums – lashes back with a vengeance.

What had been rather charming and a welcome distraction, turns somehow vile and disgusting. Maybe counterpoints like these are necessary ingredient in order to maintain the dynamics and the atmosphere in a composition such as this.

Like thick molasses the music drags itself on, attempts to grind everything in its pathway. Minute after minute passes by like this and only a small amount of evolution is allowed to appear. Shades of grey might be one way of describing what is actually going on here. It has a hypnotic or maybe even a ritualistic touch to it, especially due to the way the repetitions and evolutions of facets appear. A good amount of time later even the bass vanishes and the cold sound of the percussion instruments takes over the scene entirely. 7:44:00 appears another switch in concept, through the use of a bass-line that accompanies the drums, with the result that this “duo” introduces another calm passage ten minutes

later. A minimalist drone part is what follows, with a bass guitar and some kind of additional reverb and this is allowed to move on for a while. What comes as a definite surprise though is the way the segments breaks down again and returns with the sole performance of the drum kit. It switches back and forth, which can be examined in the fact that several minutes later the combination of bass and drums has taken over once more and only to vanish again soon after. A to and fro between these styles and in regard of the direction reminds on a run in circles somehow.

"I am I", these are the first clearly recognizable phrases in the entire composition and they show up around 8:30:00. Expressed with vigour and with conviction, these few words set the stage for a new part and with it also the style and intensity of the music receive a push. This peculiar type of doom metal continues and evolves over time. A slow and steady pace with marginal variations can be found. Noisy elements join in at around the 9th hour mark, while the music becomes more experimental and less accessible. As expected, another breakdown brings it down to an earthen level or rather a mixture between noise and drone.

Yes, also this nuisance is over at some point and ordinary metal music is allowed to unfold its potential and atmosphere again. Somewhat astounding is the hypnotic touch that shines through around 9:30:00 all of a sudden, moves on a bit and leads over to ... well ... some cool melody actually. A slowly played tune with an intense bass line in the background as well as fitting drums. It feels like a small compensation for all that the listener had gone through had to endure over all the hours and that have already gone by. The welcome rain on a hot summer day, to bring up a rather pathetic comparison. Here Sabazius allow the music to progress on a steady and continuous basis and without drifting off into the realm of experimentation and jamming. The temptation of playing around with the motives to some degree does not come as a surprise, with the result that around 10:20:00 a breakdown into minimalism appears which would be the motive from the preceding section played in a calmer kind of way.

After this part a strange type of escalation in the interpretation of a previous idea can be identified. Even though these new motives are stuck in a very repetitive kind of arrangement, they become more and more intense over time. It reminds on something that might have the potential to erupt at some point, might be ready to burst, but feels also stuck in a vague kind of self-limitation. Yet this segment is not able to contain the metal elements for too long and several minutes later the guitars help to set the beat again. Another time it feels like the tension could be unleashed should someone dare to give it a shove.

10:36:00 another switch takes place and the anticipation that the band would actually close this track with this metal segment are ruined for the moment. A surprisingly melancholic or maybe even depressive part appears, whose guitars give initially a sense of incomprehensible riff fragments but lead then over to the ordinary play of electric guitars again. A bass joins in as well and what needs to be emphasized at this point is the slightly playful touch in the main riff. To experience something like this at such a late moment of the composition is an astounding aspect when you think about it. With over ten hours already gone by such could hardly have been expected.

Out of this emerges another metal part and it comes with a good amount of power and drive. Doom metal with sludge facets but without a vocalist. The end is nigh. And the same can be said of other influences and styles, because the Brits had to turn all upside down again. Around 10:54:00 silence disrupts the nice flow of the music, while noise elements are also allowed to make reappearance. It is some type of drone that wants to have its distinct share of the cake in these final minutes as well and therefore happily joins in with various types of oscillating textures.

Nevertheless, the metal guitars have the final word and droning powerful chords set the stage for the closing minutes of this long live recording. A slow and tired segments closes it all ... it feels like all has been said for the moment and the reliance on this particular style of music comes over as a need to fall back on conservative but well-known concepts. Experiments are over, the message has been sent and the trip has finally been taken.

No final disturbance
No noisy hurrah
Some reverb
The droning of the bass

The cold sound of the drums
...and then it is over.

A short description of the music

A characteristic facet of this track is the somewhat countless switches between metal and non-metal parts. Furthermore, for this long composition the band did not fall back on a distinct red line, but rather varied all too such an extent that by doing so can be referred to as some kind of hidden imperative. The result of this jamming around forms the actual basis for the recording; the ever shifting concepts are a clear indication for that. Maybe some core aspects had been discussed beforehand, while the later execution gives rather the expression of a certain type of mood, the energy or the mind of the artist, whose duty it had been to handle an instrument. Yet leaving this immediate impression aside, it is in some respect sad to have no sound of the environment in which this piece had been recorded. No sound of footsteps as the musicians leave the room or wander around, no slamming of the door, no sound of an animal or a car passing by; somehow this would be another interpretation of the title of the release – the descent of man into an otherworldly place with the intention of making music about Man but seemingly without any; it could have been done by robots for instance¹⁷. Anyway, metal elements, drone, ambient and noise have their share on various degrees and intensities. It is the level of unpredictability that surrounds everything, this level of switching between the styles and re-interpreting the overall broad concept that leaves the listener not only fascinated but also confused over what this person has to go through over the course of this composition. Intensity and level of noisiness are also impossible to predict in any meaningful way. Repetition is excessive but might only be perceived as a liability as long as it is limited to one segment at a time. Sabazius added enough variation to the song-writing in order to water down the aspect of conceptual restrictions a bit. The closer the end of this track, the more he listener and the band seem to long for it. Exhaustion drowns the last seconds of “The Descent of Man”.

How does it fit into Sabazius' other releases?

“The Descent of Man” is in some way a continuation of an approach the band started their career with. Not surprisingly, it has been brought to rather extreme levels recently. Already on their early outputs tracks were stretched to thirty minutes and more, while “only” on their 2009 “Devotional Songs” album the barrier of one hour for one track had been broken. Should someone expect a certain trend here then this person has most certainly been misled. The Brits kept (and keep) their art in a certain corridor that is rather common for this type of genre. Only with this latest piece of audio art a push to the “extreme” can be discovered. Furthermore, with the recent announcement of a series of ep outputs, it can be expected that the length of the composition(s) will drop to rather ordinary levels again.

When it comes to the music then one has to emphasize on how it feels slightly stretched. What would otherwise had been presented in a rather concise kind of way, appears in this track in a bloated manner. Sabazius' releases are somewhat prominent for their distinct way of approaching doom metal and by building up atmosphere and tension, but on this recording such an aspect plays merely a minor role. Not overtly surprising is how dynamics are somewhat irrelevant here. Thanks to the overall length it feels also impossible to disentangle all that had been merged together. The issue of identifying and recognizing ideas or concepts from earlier recordings is limited by the actual ability of a person to keep up the interest and even more the attention to such an extent that understanding as well as putting things into perspective is still possible. Leaving the obvious aspect of time constraints aside for a moment, also the issue of doing a comparative analysis of works of such proportions comes over an ordeal few would be willing to do. Despite vague hints in a certain direction or album nothing concrete manifests itself. Somehow the music is never let loose or allowed to burst to some extreme form or level, take the listener into a different sphere, as a red line refuses to come to light. Of course the main pillars of the music can be identified and one might readily point to the consistency in the execution in which these present a continuation of Sabazius' interpretation of the doom genre.

¹⁷As had been written above, it could easily be imagined that the robot band, to which had been referred earlier, could easily perform music in a similar style and character.

Vocals and samples are something the band from the UK does not feel overtly comfortable with¹⁸. Compared with the total share of the instruments these two aforementioned facets are rather negligible and this can be discovered throughout the history of the band. As such it is of little surprise to find these on a rather minuscule scale on “The Descent of Man” and in terms of the samples, and then none can be found at all. Even in a distorted manner the voices are rarely permitted to appear. Considering the title of this release the actual (primordial?) expression of man's voice is hardly allowed to participate in this drama¹⁹. Whether this track would gain in any way from an additional element and whether it would help to push it in a different direction – in terms of the atmosphere, arrangements and such – can be debated. Except for the phrase “I am I” not much can be made out and even this is only allowed to appear in some rare moments. As such, no counterpoint to the instruments can be found or something that would help to break the ever meandering of the riffs and motives. The listener has to deal with the noise, has to deal with all the disturbing facets and elements, with nothing to push it onto a different level so to speak. It lacks the easiness, the daringness and the versatility, not to speak of the wittiness of other outputs by Sabazius. “The Descent of Man” comes over a bit forced, a bit too much and too little at the same time. A paradox made flesh.

Leaving this issue aside, another deals with the atmosphere and on how to keep it up over such a long period of time. It feels like an impossibility, because the a mere reiteration of previously used ideas or concepts would all too soon drag the overall level down to being tiresome and testing the patience of the audience over excess. Even though the basic approach follows in line with what the band had been presented numerous times already, the performance on this album breaks with a certain tendency to develop ideas. The separation of these, the use of repetition and variation of motives – from a broader and less focused perspective – are of minor importance for the progression through the various stages of this output. Sabazius fall back on a more improvised and uncertain flow in the music without a definite red line or easily identifiable conception. Whether “The Descent of Man” thwarts their original intention of making music cannot be answered readily, but at least it can be speculated about. This one track comes with influences from numerous other ones and presents them in a “composition”²⁰. A surreal distorted journey through the band's interpretation of doom, drone and noise. As each of these have their distinct share in the arrangement, “The Descent of Man” appears therefore more in an eclectic manner than some might have expected.

How to put “The Descent of Man” into the broader context of the musical arts?

Sabazius are not the first and will definitely not be the last to come up with such a piece of art. Numerous “elucidations” in various branches of the music scene can already be found and even a piece of such a gigantic proportions as the one by the Brits dwarves in comparison with some of them. Of course, this can only be debated by presenting some of these outré examples:

The Flaming Lips – The Flaming Lips 2011 #10: 24 Hour Song Skull²¹

Well, twenty-four hours is quite a challenge, but this piece does not seem to have been recorded in one session; see foot notes for an explanation on this. Nevertheless, as it can be streamed online, it is possible to fill your day with one track at a time and for good. The most interesting aspect of it has to do with the fact that a day on planet is Earth is not exactly twenty-four hours long but is slightly shorter. Theoretically speaking now, in case someone would listen to this track for every day of a year, then the positions of the arrangements should shift slightly when it comes to their exact position of the day. [Note from the editor: No, I am not going to calculate how long it would take to have one additional entire spin.]

¹⁸ An example to counter this claim would be Parousia. This 2012 output comes with a considerable share of vocals as well as samples. Similar to the track “Occult” from their eponymous debut album the content of the samples are what leave the listener fascinated as well as bewildered. Sabazius have the tendency to limit the use but set the focus on these elements once they dare to weave it into the framework.

¹⁹ See also the sentence from Luigi Russolo on the aspect of silence, because its implications are deeper than some might imagine them to be.

²⁰ This word should be taken literally here.

²¹ Information on The Flaming Lips' track can be found here:

- <http://www.discogs.com/Flaming-Lips-The-Flaming-Lips-Human-Skull-Song-2011-10/release/3605303>
- <http://flaminglipstwentfourhoursong.com/>

As Slow As Possible²²

John Cage has received quite some fame for his unorthodox works and compositions. 4'33" is just one extreme example for pushing the boundaries a bit further. While it has become famous over the years somehow, others have hardly received the attention that they actually deserve²³. As Slow As Possible or ORGAN² is a musical piece composed by John Cage, but comes with a rather vague instructions on the actual tempo in which someone is actually supposed to play it²⁴. Therefore, various attempts have been made, while one definitely takes the cake in this regard:

in Halberstadt, Germany, the Sankt-Burchardi-Church hosts an organ with which this piece is currently performed. It began in the year 2001 and is supposed to end in 2640.

Aside from this, there were and also are live performances of this composition. 14 hours and 56 minutes would not only be the longest live performance of this track but also by a human being in general²⁵. Judging from the Wikipedia entry there does not seem to be an end to this in the near future and even longer performances are being planned in the future.

And something more extreme (but honestly, these are rather of a theoretical type)

Longplayer²⁶

For most people, the cake in terms of the longest track in the history of mankind would be Longplayer. 1000 (!!!) years does it take to reach its end, while then it will (or rather is supposed to) start again from the beginning; on a side-note: it is a wonderful track for meditation.

The background of this piece of music is more complex than one might imagine in the first place and the homepage – see the foot notes – offers extensive insights into the matter. These are so far-reaching and deal with so many issues that it is beyond the scope of this review to sum them all up in a neat and concise way.

Dr Ian D Mellish – Olitsky²⁷

In case someone had been under the impression that a millenium long track would be the end of it – the definite answer to what levels music can be brought, when it comes to track lengths – then this person will be confused or amused about the things that are about to follow:

Olitsky has duration of 1,648,171 years, 7 weeks, 6 days, 10:23'33".

Take a deep breath and relax a bit. Yes, this information is correct and the artist presents it on his homepage. To even attempt to put it into the spectrum of ordinary time and space is impossible. A download of the track could not be traced though. My apologies.

²²Information on As Slow As Possible can be found here:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/As_Slow_as_Possible
- <http://www.aslsp.org/de/> (in German)

²³Ubu.com is a great source for this works:

- <http://www.ubu.com/sound/cage.html>
- Or to me a bit more specific: http://www.ubu.com/sound/cage_slouch.html (the reader/listener should go to lengths and dig to through the extensive commentary posted on this page. It clearly helps to understand the person in much better way as well as to get an insight to what levels he originally intended to push this music.

²⁴See Wikipedia for more information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/As_Slow_as_Possible

²⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/As_Slow_as_Possible#Performances

²⁶Information on Longplayer can be found here:

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longplayer>
- <http://www.longplayer.org/>

²⁷Information on Dr Ian D Mellish can be found here:

- http://www.red-wharf.com/mel_music_03.htm#olitsky

Bull of Heaven

A band whose music heads for limits outside of any sane spectrum is “Bull of Heaven”. It is impossible to measure it by ordinary standards, because the compositions are extreme on so many levels. A glance over the band's history on their Wikipedia entry reveals it readily enough.²⁸ The longest track ever is 260: lcm(2,3,5,7,11,13,17,19,23,29,31,37,41,43,47,53,59,61,67,71,73,79,83) and would last for the short time span of 8,462,937,602,125,701,219,674,955.2362595095 years.

[note from the editor: these are just the prime numbers up to eighty-three ... keep this in mind, please. A further inclusion of numbers would increase the length even more; exponentially and not linear of course.]

With a bit above the eleven hours mark Sabazius' piece is nothing more than a small spark of light compared to what other artists have headed for already. As can be seen from what had been outlined in the preceding paragraphs, what is considerably outré in the metal scene – this categorization still holds true even though the arrangements and the style of music prohibit such a labelling in the first place – has found its niche in the arts already. It can even be brought to more extreme levels. Imagine a stage, preferably in a very large city, which is constantly occupied and played upon. This constant performance and the likeliness to see or rather experience countless styles and expressions would truly bring this idea to the extreme. Of course an Internet project could be used as a platform as well, but to actually organize it in a proper kind of way could prove to be difficult, at least from the current perspective. Nevertheless, to even think of musicians from around the globe to play music at a similar time and without the restriction of boundaries – time, space and social status – would definitely mark a transition towards a better understanding and collaboration between the cultures. Also the difficulties in not only organizing but also in actually proceeding with the music could help to gain insights into how people and cultures differ from each other and how these gaps can be bridged. Also the aspect of intercultural group dynamics would be an interesting issue that could be studied in real time and on a larger basis.

Interpreting this release

Be it Napalm Death's “You Suffer” or Sabazius' “The Descent of Man”, both have one thing in common: it is difficult to come up with a convincing and thorough analysis of how to put all into a broader perspective. With nearly only the music and some minuscule amount of lyrics at hand, an attempt to boil all down to one concise idea seems to be a hopeless task or futile or whatever term you want to use in this regard. Also the overall length has its implication of course and fires back of course.

Undoubtedly, the title points towards the book by Charles Darwin and it is rather futile to attempt to discuss this aspect away. It hangs over this output like a burden, like a guillotine whose energy longs to be set free. Is this all to which it can be narrowed down? Is there nothing more that can be interpreted into this strange and confusing release?

*The book discusses many related issues, including evolutionary psychology, evolutionary ethics, differences between human races, differences between sexes, the dominant role of women in choosing mating partners, and the relevance of the evolutionary theory to society.*²⁹

Can something as comprehensive as this be dealt with in such a “minimalist” manner like Sabazius did it on this output? “I am I”, these are the sole words that can be discerned clearly throughout the release, come over as an excuse, as an apology for all the malefaction of Man throughout his bloody history. We are the way we are and there is no way around it, no possibility to point into a different direction and to someone else. It is a hollow cry of war, a hollow attempt to put all into its place. If someone is bound to a certain undeniable inescapable behaviour and action, then his or her systemic implications appear in a strange and confusing light. “I am I” is undeniably

²⁸Wikipedia entry of “Bull of Heaven”:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bull_of_Heaven
- <http://www.bullofheaven.com/>

²⁹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Descent_of_Man_and_Selection_in_Relation_to_Sex (2013-06-19)

pathetic through the irrefutable way in which it is expressed. In all its perversion it reflects the death longing of the species in a coded expression³⁰.

When it comes to the music then the endless switches between the extremes and intensities reflect in some way the uncertainty in the overall development of Man. Constancy is something this species has always had difficulties with. Be it the aspect of war, the amount of racism towards minorities or intellectual developments, the numerous ages of the past offer too many examples of persecution, violent, torture and destruction to ignore them. Yes, a pathetic Manichaeian view on our history, an unnecessary reduction of all the complexity, facets and elements. Therefore, it is strange how this track remains on such a low level and does not dare to break all boundaries so to speak. Compared with black metal for instance the performance is rather calm and confusing, while it remains satisfied in the closet. It pushes here and it pushes there, it hopes to annoy through the use of noise, it hopes to lure the listener into the realm of the surreal through the use of repetition and it sets a pace with an endless unpredictability. Yet it is a journey into nothingness, a definite accommodation for no one.

A striking aspect is the absence of silence. For some reason Sabazius had the simple urge to fill each of the seconds with sound and avoid the intensity of silence. Why not leave the listener for a couple of minutes, or ten or a quarter of an hour? Why do all the gaps have to be filled with something³¹? Why does everything have to be concrete in some strange kind of way? The Brits are not alone with their refusal to use this facet for their art, even though it might have served them well for their rather daring attempt in this regard. It can easily be imagined that longer breaks of silence are interrupted by some dissonance, some lacklustre way of playing the instrument so to speak, with the obvious result that whatever kind of harmony had been created before breaks down into an unrecognisable mess. Sadly, there is never a tendency to reach for such levels and to push the music to some conceptual extremes. A longing for harmony where such a thing should the least exist. Even the noisy drone parts appear in such a way because they have an underlying harmonious current or could be perceived in such a way that they are nothing more than a bridge towards a less tempestuous realm. A “descent” would have been bereft of all the catastrophes that Man had gone through since his early days; examples are obvious and do not need to be listed. Also the first quote by Luigi Russolo should be brought back to memory.

An aspect that receives not as much attention as it actually should be has to do with the design of the release, its physical manifestation. Luckily the band dared to venture beyond the ordinary scope and added something to the already daring conception of the music: an eye-catcher to those, whose musical collection knows no limits or boundaries – an artefact of a rather unconventional kind. Along with the support of a comparably large label – Earache Records – all these facets are definitely useful to Sabazius in order to receive some amount of recognition in the music scene. Nevertheless, it is a curious thing to find a skull used for the actual design, because it wakes memories on another long composition: The Flaming Lips – The Flaming Lips 2011 #10: 24 Hour Song Skull (see above). Of course these two artefacts are not similar in style and expression. While the one from The Flaming Lips focusses rather on the anatomy of a human skull, Sabazius' take on it is more artistic and offers more ways of interpreting it. For instance, judging from the images that have been published of it since, from the squama frontalis down to the proc. frontalis a set of four playing card suits – diamonds, clubs, spades and hearts; from top to bottom – can be discerned. Whether this wants to emphasize the aspect of chance or unpredictability is an open question, but it is nonetheless curious how these four symbols appear exposed on the skull. Somehow they are a focal point, especially as the artefact itself is more of a confusing set of lines and fragments, which does not give away too much: except for a certain lack of predictability maybe, something quite characteristic for the music itself.

When it comes to the title “The Descent of Man” and how this is reflected through the skull, then the matter is much more complex and less satisfying. As has been argued in the introduction of this review, the terminology of “descent” is by no means clear cut and without ambiguity. Initially it may come over as static, but in order to reach a different state some kind of dynamic element had to have an influence at some point. As such it is definite and clear cut, which can be examined through the way all hinges together. It exposes an otherwise hidden “core” and a state of evolution, while preceding steps on the evolutionary ladder are neglected. Maybe the four playing card suits help to set the proper context in this regard: the idea of chance that has been burned-in right on the front of the skull and for everyone “to see”. As such the current state reflects merely one possibility

³⁰see also Ulrich Horstmann's *Das Untier*. In this book he discusses anthropocentrism in contrast to an anthropofugal world view.

³¹This is also something that bands in the depressive black metal genre do not get. They drown every second with something, which is why in the end they all too often tend to offer nothing.

and how it is supposed to be placed in a cultural-historical context is indicated through the term “descent”; as has been outlined above and in some detail. Sadly, this reductive expression feels kind of shallow, especially when compared to other approaches of the past on similar topics³². A composition of various facets of Man's evolution might have been a better choice for giving an impression of the multitude of stages this species has gone through over the ages. The schizophrenic nature comes over in a too conventional and ordinary kind of way. The expression is also too definite compared with the ever-shifting style of the music.

While writing these lines another interpretation came to mind. The idea of having endless successions of similar musical concepts presented in such a “bombastious” kind of fashion can be interpreted in such a way as to reflect the modern radio and audio phenomena. With an increasing tendency to narrow the overall musical approach and variety in the mainstream, the modern audience is basically experiencing something similar to “The Descent of Man”. It is the standard set so to speak that is thrown towards the listener in sheer uncountable barrages and without mercy or consideration of the effects. Lyrics, whose words are hollow and meaningless, lure the audience into a surreal realm of expectations and supposedly cultural values. Sabazius mock this through the absence of nearly any form of text. It is the sound that is there. It is the amount of time that parts of the working population have to deal with this kind of subverse manipulation. They have to deal with this audio terror on a daily basis and with definitely no escape in sight. They get up in the early morning and turn on the radio. Yet, instead of receiving some kind of useful information that could help them to get a better insight into the chaos of the surrounding world, they are dragged away into realm of triviality, gossip and shallowness. Thus it begins, thus it continues and thus it will presumably always be.

“The Descent of Man” is an endless gibberish, whose incomprehensibility has become flesh in the countless ways of modern mass communication. While some kind of HNW33 might be more appropriate for expressing the actual confusion of the mind, the inability to escape the immediateness or permanence of the information, Sabazius attempt to deal with the underlying subliminal current in their own distinct way of playing music. The shift in terms of attentiveness of the mind from something deep to something shallow, finds expression in the long composition of this band.³⁴ Maybe an even longer performance, as has been in the mind of the Brits, would reflect the tiredness of the band to an even larger degree and thereby also the one of the society. At some point the music would simply leave the spectrum of sanity and wander off into the realm of incomprehensible dissonances, whose share is likely to see an increase with each passing minute. Back to the current version and what had been proposed above, the music has the tendency to be both and nothing at the same time. Passages have a meaning by themselves, but can be of fading importance in a broader examination of the composition. This paradox increases in significance in even longer attempts of making music.

Closing comments

Did you enjoy this long piece of music?
Do you think that band spent their time worthwhile in recording it?
Should they do it again?
Should they try to push it to even more extremes?
L'art pour l'art?

A question that remains in the end is the benefit from such a piece of art. What is it that the listener is able to take with him/her? Music pushed to such extremes presents the art outside of the realm of the ordinary as well as what can be comprehended. There is nothing to sing along to. There is nothing to recall without difficulty. There is also nothing that can easily be debated among friends, because the chances are comparably slim to find a larger portion of people who have taken the trip called “The Descent of Man”.

Not only the questions above come to mind, others could be brought up easily and without much effort. When it comes to actually seeking some answers, then the matters are definitely more complicated. Of course to throw out some ready-made phrases can be done by almost anyone, but considering the conception of this piece of

³²See: “Sprachen des Futurismus”, page 172: profilo continuo, which was inspired by B'foi Parállëloi.

³³HNW is an abbreviation for Harsh Noise Wall. This is a very extreme type of harsh noise music and extensive debated in the noise scene; see the article in “As Loud As Possible” #1 for instance.

³⁴It is what Byung Chul Han discusses in his book “Müdigkeitsgesellschaft”.

music, it feels like that those would merely scratch the surface, while all of what lies beyond the immediate remains untouched, ignored etc. Also the numerous pages of this review are nothing but a spotlight from a certain direction. Other interpretations can be brought up as well. References to other cultural facets thrown into the debate.

In the end one has to point to a certain level of distance that lies between the band and the “audience”. Something impossible to comprehend or to bridge. Few would take on what Sabazius actually demand from them. Therefore, one additional interpretation of the name is brought into play: the descent of man into this world of strange sounds and arrangements feels like impossibility – an invitation that is left close to the coffee maker – out of sight and out of immediate recognition.

Literature used or recommended

Luigi Russolo:

http://www.ubu.com/historical/gb/russolo_noise.pdf

Gustave Le Bon:

The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind

Sigmund Freud:

Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse

<http://adriansol2.blogspot.ca/2013/04/sabazius-you-suffer-and-shifting-goal.html>

As Loud As Possible:

<http://www.asloudaspossible.org/>

F.T. Marinetti – The Futurist Manifesto (aka The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism)

(20th February 1909)

http://www.ubu.com/papers/marinetti_futurist-manifesto.html

For some insights into the realm of long compositions, the following sites offer vague glimpses into the matter:

<http://mamacolive.com/thefly/blog/6717/Long-Players/>

<http://www.offbeatearth.com/the-longest-songs-ever/> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/>